

Statement of Senator John McCain
10/20/99 Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Hearing On
Performance Enhancing Drug Use in Olympic Competition

Earlier this year, this Committee conducted a hearing into the bribery and corruption scandal resulting from Salt Lake City's bid to host the 2002 Winter Olympics. Similar revelations have since emerged regarding the Atlanta bid efforts. There was, and is, a sense of urgency about these scandals that seems to surpass what we might normally expect from such events. The reason for this extraordinary concern, I believe, is that the corruption scandal threatens something more basic. It threatens the integrity of the Olympic games.

The Olympics are one of the most significant recurring global events. The Olympics represent a coalescing moment when we set aside our competing economic and nationalistic agendas celebrate the pursuit of simple, graceful human excellence. The triumphs that we have witnessed together through the Olympic games are a common experience. The glory of athletic achievement in one moment both elevates us above those things which divide us, and reduces us to the simple human dignity that is the essence of who we are and what we hold in common. The historic achievements of Jesse Owens both symbolized athletic excellence and spoke eloquently of freedom and equality in the face of a dictator. The grace and elegance of eastern European gymnasts during the 70's and 80's became a silent, yet deafening expression of individualism in the cold world of communist oppression. The stunning victories of today's athletes like Picabo Street define the rugged individualism and freedom that is sweeping the world.

Olympic competition has always been a great leveler, where agendas are left behind in the common pursuit of excellence. However, this ideal is now threatened by something far more destructive than bureaucratic corruption. The explosion in the use of performance enhancing drugs threatens to debase the integrity of Olympic competition itself. Recent years have seen an ever-accelerating rate of drug use among athletes. Revelations about the use of performance enhancing drugs have served to both expose the complexity of the challenge of detection and enforcement of drug policies, and the gross shortcomings of the existing United States Olympic Committee and the International Olympic Committee efforts to address the challenge.

What I wish to underscore by this hearing is that there are no simple solutions to this challenge. As our nation has seen in its failed war on drugs, success in curbing drug use of any kind is illusive. However, a consensus on the necessary elements of an approach to curbing the use of performance enhancing drugs exists.

The first step is the establishment of an independent or external agency to perform year-round, out of competition testing for banned substances. The governing board of this agency must include significant athlete representation and must have complete control over the administration, analysis, and reporting of drug tests. Testing must be universal in that all athletes wishing to compete in the Olympic games should be required to submit to the testing regime established by this independent agency. Significant investment should be made in the research and development of advanced technologies and strategies for the detection and verification of the use of banned substances. Finally, a comprehensive and sustained anti-drug and sports ethics education program should be developed and implemented.

In an effort to achieve these final two objectives, I will soon introduce legislation providing for grants to United States universities to conduct research and development programs designed to develop new technologies and strategies for the detection and verification of drug use among athletes. This legislation will also include grants to universities for the development and implementation of athlete drug education and ethics programs for university and elite athletes.

Olympic competition has always served as a beacon of hope in an often divided world. Our United States Olympians serve as role models of excellence. However, as will be pointed out here today, performance enhancing drug use among young people is now on par with statistics on use of other illegal drugs. We all have a vested interest in reversing this scourge. To fail to act decisively would result in the demise not only of a transcendent athletic event, but of an event that, through pure competition elevates a set of ideals centered upon discipline, perseverance, excellence, and individual human achievement that are so critical in a world increasingly void of such things.

